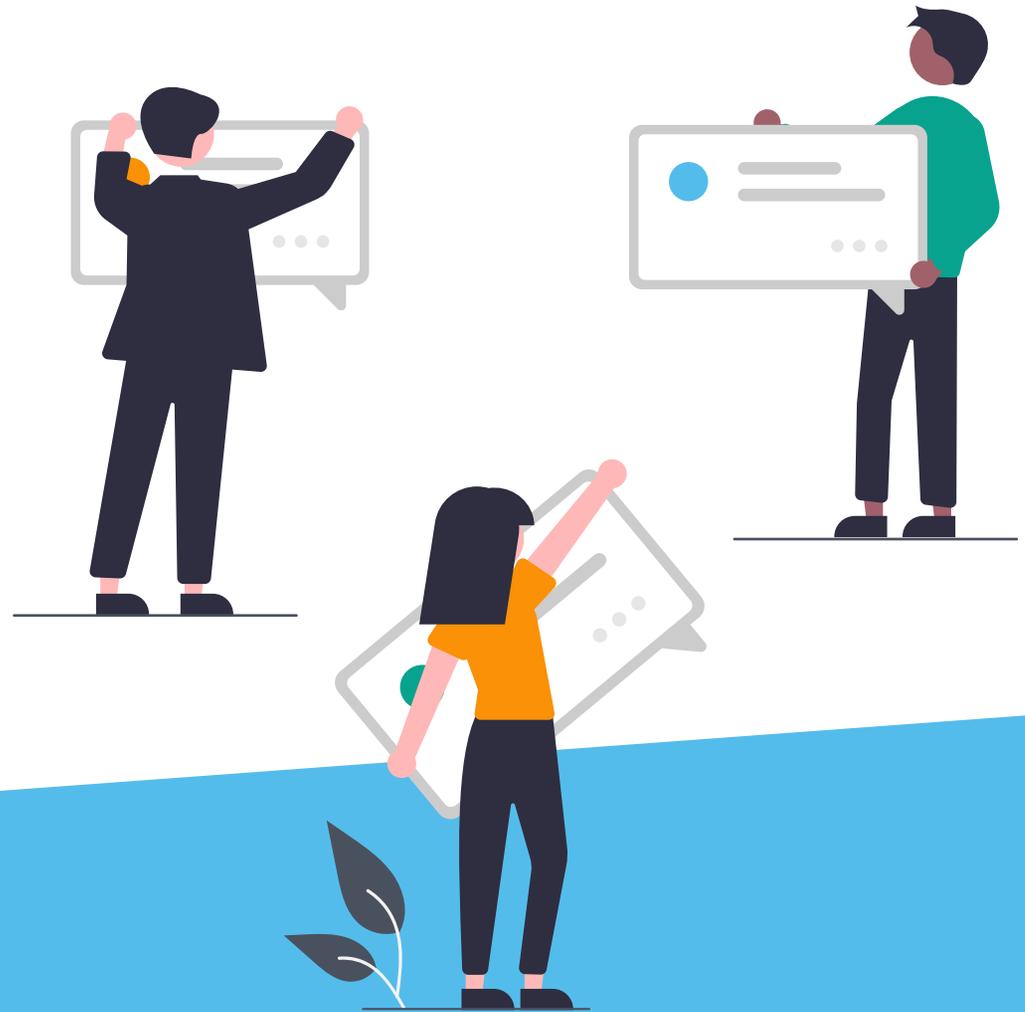THE RIGHT WAY TO
MONITOR PRODUCTIVITY:

# Performance Monitoring That **Builds Employee Wellbeing**

O f all the problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic, one of the most insidious is now in our day-to-day: chronic burnout affecting individuals, teams, and organizations across every industry and geography.[1]

According to research from Gallup, more than a third of U.S. employees now "live at work,"[2] making it harder than ever to create clear boundaries between work and life. Employees find themselves immersed in these two roles 24/7 as the world goes in and out of lockdown — contributing to ever-high levels of chronic workplace stress.[3]

As employees struggle to balance work and life, employers wrestle with their organization's increasingly erratic schedules, work output, and communication. It's become natural to wonder if the organization is performing at the same level as when employees worked onsite.

There's only one way to find out: employee productivity monitoring (EPM) software. But if your first thought is recording screens and tracking keystrokes, you'll find your ideas about this technology are woefully outdated. As it turns out, ethical employee productivity monitoring is about more than catching employees in the act of slacking off — it can actually play a foundational role in maintaining employee wellbeing and productivity.

"The pandemic introduced an enormous amount of change into employee's personal and professional lives," explains Elliott Tiernan, Head of Pre-Sales-North America at ActiveOps. "And when you experience change, you feel out of control and stressed. Anything employers can do to give employees the tools to take more control over their work experience and to make informed decisions about the use of their time can be empowering and healthy."
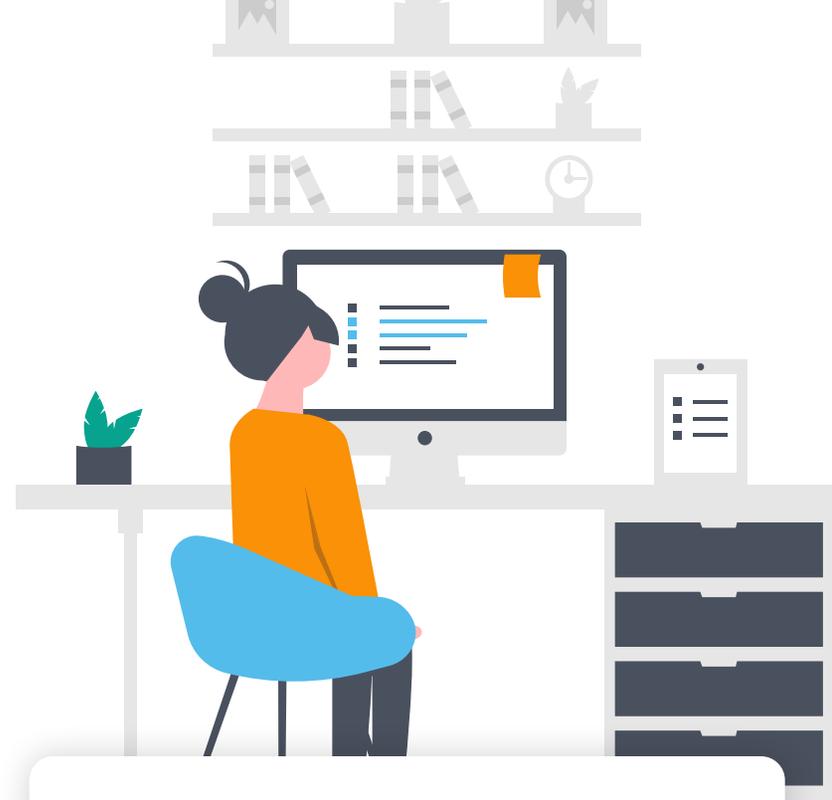
"Productivity is important, whether a person is in an office or working from home — **a bigger question is whether or not the right outcomes are being delivered collectively.**"

JOY SANTOSH
Executive Vice President, Head of Operations at ActiveOps

What is **ethical employee productivity monitoring?**

EPM was not invented in response to the pandemic, though the pandemic has increased interest in the line of products designed to track employee activity throughout the workday. But the concept of ethical EPM is rather new and it stems from the fine line employers must walk between employee surveillance (generally accepted to be poor for employee engagement and morale[4]) and EPM, which places the emphasis on employee wellness, performance, and employee empowerment rather than corporate oversight.

If your organization is ready to measure and support the highest levels of employee performance and well-being, here are three foundations to balance employee productivity monitoring the right way:

Three foundations of effective EPM:
- Look through the lens of employee wellness
- Capture data at the aggregate and individual level
- Support changes with hands-on coaching

> "The majority of companies we speak with consider working remotely to be a permanent shift in their business plan, to the extent that they're letting go of historical buildings they've owned for decades. With this realization, they must set their sight on the best way to pivot and adjust with a large part of the workforce operating remotely, all while maintaining a winning position in the industry. **Employee productivity monitoring supports this pivot — but only when it's done ethically."**

JOY SANTOSH
Executive Vice President, Head of Operations at ActiveOps

Look through the lens of **employee wellness**

At first glance, employee productivity monitoring appears to be a Draconian attempt to micromanage the time and mouse-clicks of an entire workforce (a practice that does not end well, especially among tech-savvy team members who can generate their own mouse-clicking program). But this outdated view is both impractical and inefficient, especially in a working environment when employees are operating under immense stress and the ever-present threat of burnout.

In fact, a 2017 study by Baylor University[5] found that monitoring software correlated with greater employee tension and less job satisfaction, indicating higher turnover intent, a situation that would only be exacerbated by the stresses of working remotely during a pandemic.

Ethical EPM, on the other hand, turns employee behaviors into a measurable source of information about employee wellbeing. It shows employees, managers, and the organization how an individual spends their screen time and how productive they've been so they can adapt what isn't working to be more intentional — not so they can punish those who aren't working.

"It's hard to understand your own performance because the measure of what good looks like is so subjective," said Spencer O'Leary, CEO of North America at ActiveOps. "EPM software allows an employee to assign real metrics to what a good day looks like — and a bad one — so they know where to aim when they sit down to their workday."

> **"Self-performance management is an incredibly powerful tool.** As an employee, if you can help me understand my performance, compared to my team's aggregate, compared to the company's aggregate, it triggers my natural human instinct to improve my performance. It shows me — through data — that the person responsible for my performance is me."

SPENCER O'LEARY
CEO of North America at ActiveOps

Employee-Centered Productivity Monitoring **for the Organization**

Employee experiences change in work demand or pattern

WorkiQ captures change in working pattern on a well-being report

Manager scans report or receives alert noting employee's excessive work hours and daily logins

Manager initiates conversation with the employee to review workload and assess risk for burnout

Employee-Centered Productivity Monitoring **for the Employee**

Employee experiences a sudden change in work schedule or output

WorkiQ notes the change on a well-being report

Employee scans report or receives alert noting excessive work hours and daily logins

Employee considers ways to streamline their workday, take more breaks, and reach out for support

Joy Santosh, Executive Vice President, Head of Operations at ActiveOps, likened it to the consumer trend of tracking time with an app or movement with a smartwatch: employees feel empowered when they receive information about how they spend their time. In fact, Santosh has found that the great majority of employees don't mind being observed once they understand the monitoring is in place for their own use to help them stay on course, keep a tab on their working hours, and gain more autonomy about when and where they choose to work.

"Ethical employee productivity monitoring shows you both sides of the spectrum of employee productivity," explains Santosh "High productivity, logging in seven days a week for 12 hours a day? You can flag the

activity and proactively monitor for burnout. Not getting a lot done? It might be as simple as evaluating an employee's workload to make sure they're being assigned tasks they're trained and qualified to do."

In one example, an organization was preparing to place an employee on a performance improvement plan (PIP) for low productivity. But using an EPM provider, they were able to see that the employee wasn't slacking off or performing below their ability — they were simply spending so much time in the training modules learning how to do the new tasks they were assigned that it was taking time away from other responsibilities. Thanks to this insight, the employee's manager was able to intervene, adjust the employee's tasks, and save the relationship.

Capture data at the
aggregate and individual level

Few EPM tools are able to handle the technical requirements for capturing the activity of thousands of employee workstations at once, but that's exactly what an organization needs in order to unveil real insights. Understanding employee productivity at the individual, team, departmental, and organizational levels allows an organization to monitor overall trends, uncover leading themes, and make the data practical, not punitive.

> "Employee productivity monitoring data must be real-time in order to be effective. Real-time data gives you **leading** metrics, which allow you to look into the future with confidence. Delayed data gives **lagging** metrics, which look at what's happened in the past - **it is useful but takes time to analyze and enable quick decisions.**"

JOY SANTOSH

Executive Vice President, Head of Operations at ActiveOps

"Having this data at your disposal doesn't change the fact that this should be fundamentally for your employees," explained Tiernan. "You're not looking for the bad, you're looking for the good. You're asking why one team has better results than another and looking for what you can learn from that and share with other teams, and you're doing so quickly. You're closing the feedback loop between new best practices and company-wide implementation, and that can have an enormous positive impact on the team."

Capturing data at the aggregate and individual levels in real-time also allows an organization to uncover bigger, company-wide trends that can drive overall business efficiency.

"The most important asset in any organization is the human you employ," says Santosh. "When you measure the productivity of your employees, you're measuring business efficiency in terms of allocated resources and the output they achieve. Keeping a close eye on productivity — even from a distance — allows managers to more carefully allocate time for activities like cross-training, preparing their team for moments of intensity."

Santosh noted the example of a large regional bank that had implemented ethical EPM software. The team had been carefully monitoring productivity and allocating resources to training and inter-departmental flexibility prior to the pandemic, leaving them more prepared than other banking organizations to handle the internal
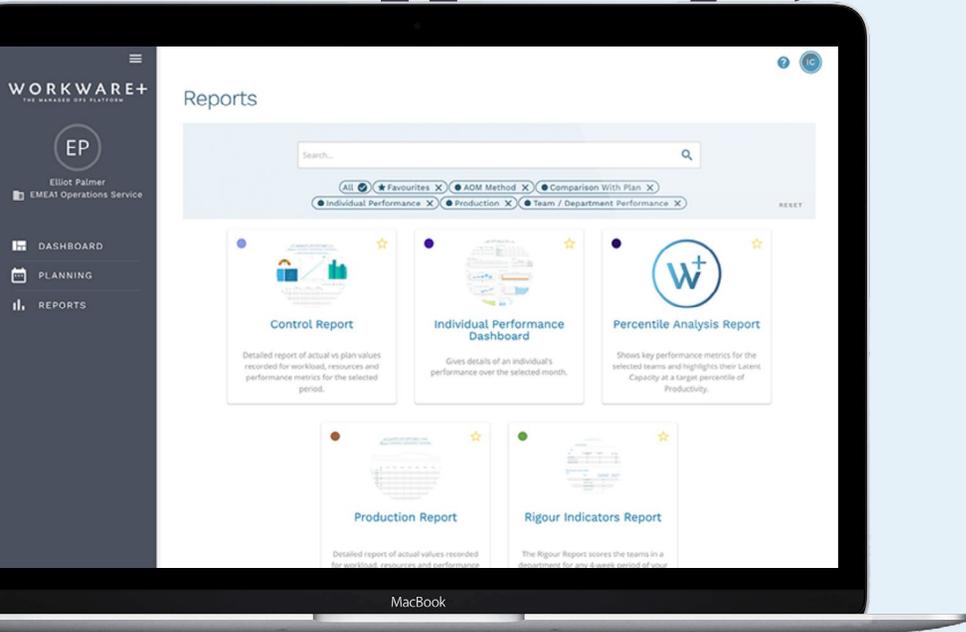
fluctuations of remote work as well as the workload fluctuations from changes in consumer banking behavior. When the bank saw its customer's retail spend drop significantly, replaced by a significant increase in online buying, its employees were able to seamlessly manage the 30% increase in work volumes and work in progress for the customer support teams. They were responsive, flexible, and agile — and achieved excellent results irrespective of the pandemic's effect on operations and the fact they were no longer working onsite.

In another example, a financial institution used EPM software to observe an alarming workforce trend: pre-pandemic, the organization saw about five hours of work for every seven hours an employee was paid for. Once the pandemic struck, that number dropped to four hours. EPM software, applied correctly with employee wellbeing in mind, helped the organization find the gap for more than 15,000 staff members — an incredible cost savings for the bottom line.

> **"How an organization uses time is critical information for operations.** It informs so many things, especially when the pace of the organization is driven by variability of what's coming in the door. When employees are more informed about their workloads and how they structure their day, they're better able to balance resources and maintain productivity no matter what's coming in — which is essential in creating company-wide balance."

ELLIOTT TIERNAN
Head of Pre-Sales-North America at ActiveOps

Support changes with **hands-on coaching**

It's one thing to understand that employee monitoring data should work to benefit the employee. It's another thing entirely to put that theory to practice. And that's why so many organizations can get stuck in the change management process where EPM feels stifling and restrictive rather than helpful. The best results will come from choosing a provider that offers hands-on coaching for the implementation and maintenance of the software — ideally from a team with years of experience in operations.

"No EPM tool should be implemented without appropriate coaching and support from a provider with a pedigree in operations," said Santosh. "Monitoring without proper coaching and support, a lack of understanding of how organizations operate and misinterpreting what motivates people will not create sustainable change — and it will contribute to the falling dominos of morale, performance, quality, customer service, and so on. By the time an organization wakes up to this missing piece, it's too late, and it will cost an enormous amount of resources and time to go back and redo it."

> **"Real insight comes from layering decades of operational experience with real-time data about employee performance.** With this information in hand, managers have what they need to help those who are struggling and provide more challenging opportunities to those who are thriving."

ELLIOTT TIERNAN

Head of Pre-Sales-North America at ActiveOps
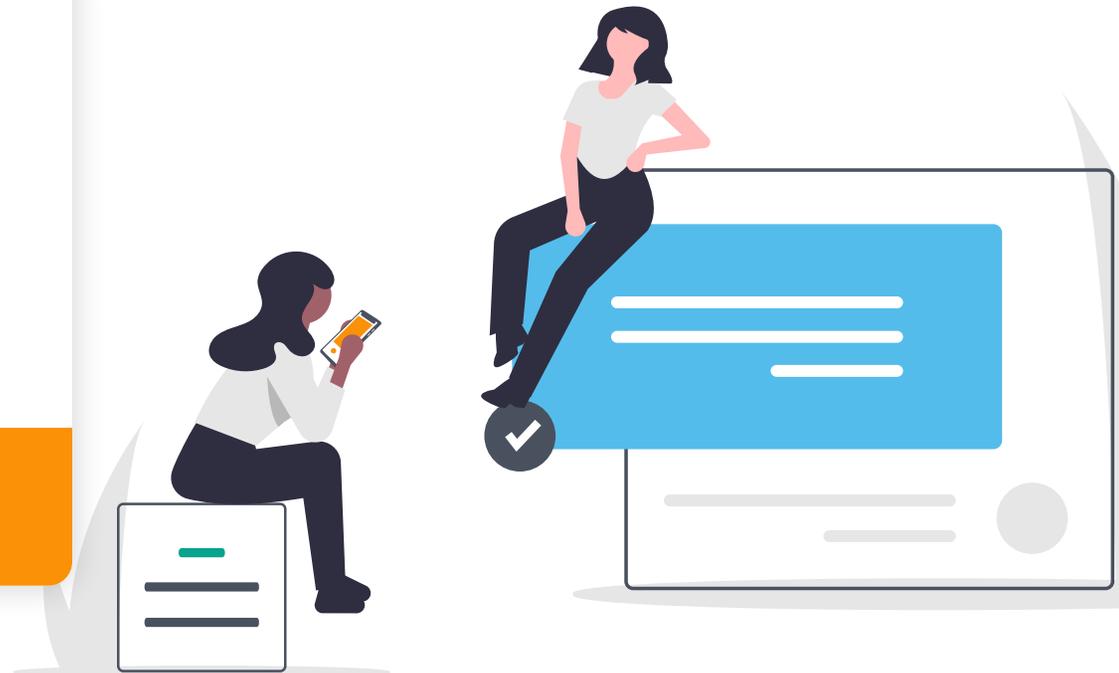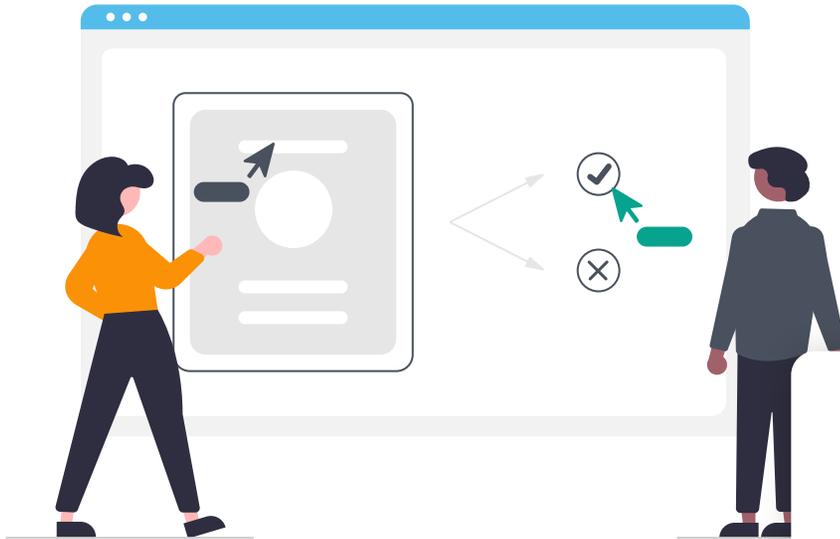
Proactive coaching and guidance from an experienced partner gives organizations the ability to put the employee at the center of the change, increasing the likelihood employees will adopt and take full advantage of the resource.

For example, one software company implemented employee surveillance technology to record screens and track mouse movements to ensure employees were working. Within hours, these tech-savvy employees had installed mouse-jiggler software to circumvent being tracked in this way — a prime example of EPM gone wrong. Instead, ethical employee productivity monitoring would proactively coach the end-user to change their behavior in order to give the individual employee a deep understanding of the why and how of monitoring. Ultimately, the employee comes to see EPM software as a powerful tool in their toolbox.

"When employees worked onsite, managers could rely on their eyes to spot underperformance and wellbeing. But in shifting into a remote work setting, employers have lost that visual control. Coaching gives your organization the support it needs to separate the data from behaviors and put the employee at the center of the change — l**eading to transformative results when it comes to productivity.**"

ELLIOTT TIERNAN
**Head of Pre-Sales-North America at ActiveOps**
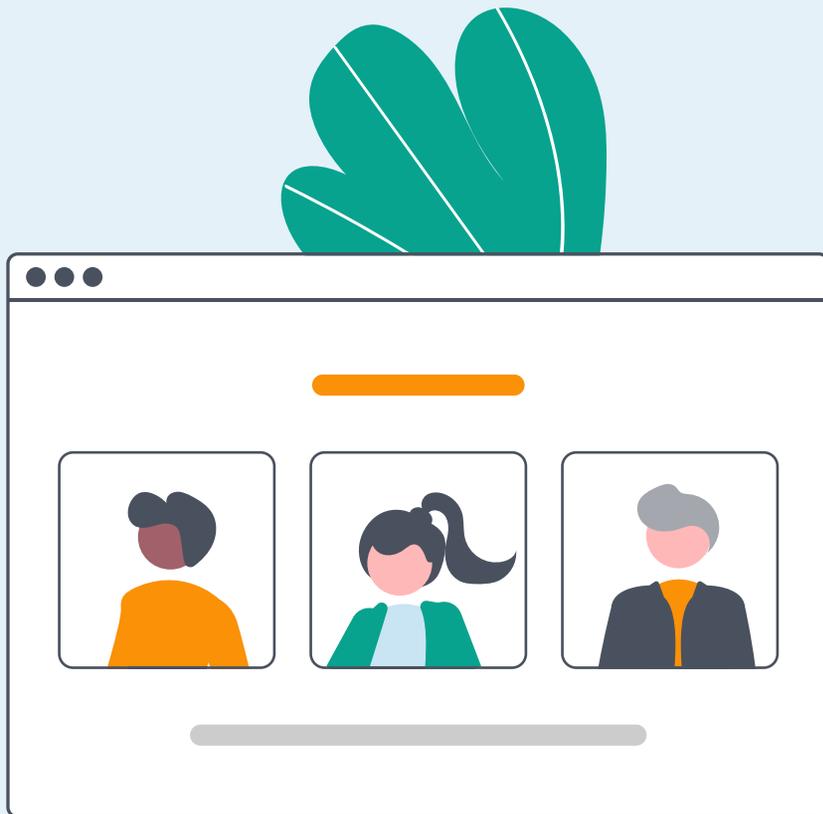
Putting the right data into **the right context**

EPM is not about catching people in the wrong. It's about giving employees and organizations the information they need to ensure that working remotely is just as productive as working from the office — and knowing exactly which levers to pull if it isn't.

Now more than ever, performance matters. But so do people. The organizations that will thrive in the world of remote work are the ones that help employees find a balance between work and life, focus and distraction, and performance and flexibility.

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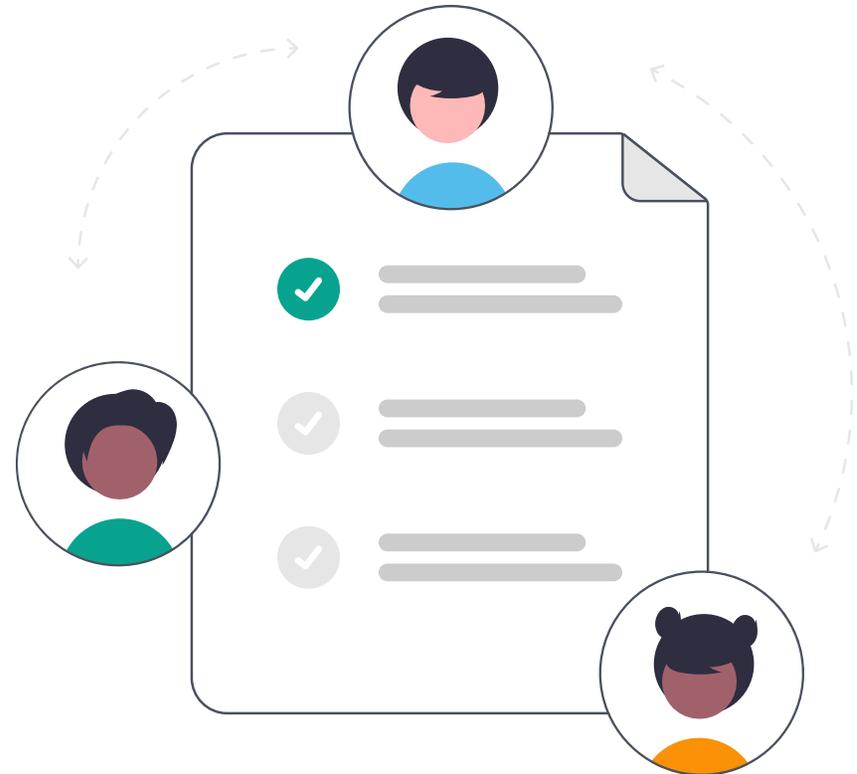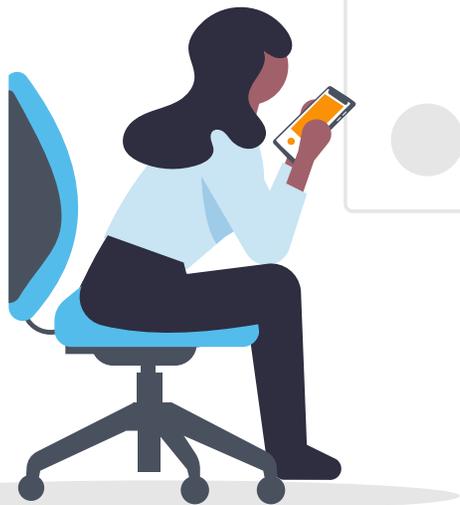
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ActiveOps helps organizations turn operational management from a guessing game into a game-changing source of efficiency and value. Our platform – including Workware+, the Active Operations Management (AOM) Method and OpsIndex – provides real-time employee productivity monitoring and workforce management technologies for a 360° view of your operations – both digital and human.

With more than 20 years' experience managing complex operations in labor- and knowledge-intensive industries such as banking and insurance, ActiveOps enables managers to transform productivity, secure employee wellbeing and create a platform for confident, constant transformation and market leadership.

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